

# Spirit ADVOCATE

A6 Wednesday, September 12, 2018

WRITE TO US Send letters to editor@spiritofjefferson.com. We ask that you keep each one to 400 words or less. Include a phone number (just needed for verification) and your town of residence

LEIGH KOONCE

## How is Sebastian Gorka a fitting speaker for Jefferson?

This weekend, my friends in the leadership of the Republican Party of Jefferson County are welcoming Sebastian Gorka to their annual Eisenhower Dinner, which should concern us all. Gorka is a former White House aide with a long history of supporting organizations that have sowed discord, supported fascist policies and espoused anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Gorka was hired by President Trump's White House to serve as a top national security aide and was on staff from the administration's start until Aug. 25 when he was seemingly fired a week after Steve Bannon's ouster, though Gorka claims to have resigned.

Born and raised in the United Kingdom, Gorka, now 47, is of Hungarian descent and has kept a hand in the politics of Hungary. In 2007, he voiced his support, on video, for the Magyar Garda, also known as the Hungarian Guard, a militia with a history of anti-Semitic and neo-fascist rhetoric.

The government of Hungary forced the Magyar Garda to disband, a decision appealed all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, which upheld the lower court and government's ruling. Volatile rhetoric is nothing new in politics, and unfortunately is on the rise, but actively supporting an organization that has espoused open hostility to ethnic or religious groups shouldn't be tolerated in the United States.

Now we all know these political dinners



**WANT TO GO?** The Jefferson County GOP hosts Sebastian Gorka at 6 p.m. Saturday at a \$70-per-person dinner at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races. The controversial former White House aide will be the keynote speaker at the group's annual Eisenhower Dinner named in honor of Dwight Eisenhower (left), the Republican who served as president from 1953 to 1961 and who fought Nazis as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War II.

serve to rally the base and raise money. As chairman of the Jefferson County Democratic Party's executive committee, I've chaired a few myself, including one held in April featuring remarks from Democrat Jason Kander.

Kander, who enlisted in the Army National Guard after the horrific September 11th attacks, later was deployed to Afghanistan as an intelligence officer then taught at the Missouri Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School. He was later elected Secretary of State of Missouri, thus continuing his record of service. I offer his record as a stark contrast to the background of Gorka.

The most recent census has posted West Virginia's veteran population at about 10.5 percent of the total population, with Jefferson

and Berkeley counties having slightly higher percentages than that of the state. Would not a speaker with a background in veterans' affairs have been an appropriate speaker for a political dinner in Jefferson County? Or perhaps an expert in poverty policy, renewable energy or the opioid epidemic?

It seems to me that Gorka misses the mark for Jefferson County and West Virginia.

— Leigh Koonce is a Jefferson County native active with Democratic Party leadership. He also serves on the county Historic Landmarks Commission and in other roles



THE TELEGRAPH

Sebastian Gorka, formerly a top White House aide and now a Fox News contributor, will speak in Charles Town this weekend. The 47-year-old has been accused of having ties to the alt-right in the United States and in 2017 had to bat down allegations of neo-Nazi links after he was seen wearing a medal awarded to his father by Hungary's Order of Vitéz — a group the U.S. State Department lists as being directed by Nazi Germany.

MICHAEL ZARIN

## Rockwool seeks to be a good neighbor in our communities

At Rockwool Group, we take pride in being a good neighbor and an integral part of every community in which we work. We consider our employees and their neighbors to be our community, which is why we provide well-paid local jobs, good benefits and give to local community organizations.

We also take pride in the fact that our stone wool products are among the most sustainable forms of insulation on the planet. It is non-combustible without using flame retardants, provides superior energy efficiency benefits and provides unrivaled durability in that it can last more than 50 years without losing its insulating or non-combustibility features or its structural stability. At the end of its useful life, the insulation can be fully recycled into new insulation. Over its lifespan, our building insulation saves 85 times the energy needed to produce it.

We understand, however, that how we produce our products is especially important to our neighbors. That is why we take false and misleading claims regarding how we operate

very seriously. We have worked to provide as much fact-based information as possible over the past weeks. That was the purpose of the four community open houses we hosted recently as well as our participation in public meetings at the Ranson, Charles Town and Shepherdstown city councils, the Jefferson County Commission, and Jefferson County Board of Education.

An opinion piece [by Robert Miller] published in this newspaper on Sept. 5 repeats demonstrably false information. We have responded to these falsehoods before, but unfortunately, sometimes the convenient rumor spreads faster than the truth.

Here is the truth, which we will repeat as many times as required until it becomes common knowledge throughout Jefferson County:

Rockwool Group has been operating for more than 80 years, with 45 manufacturing facilities around the world. We have never operated in any part of Missouri as the writer asserts. The investigation mentioned involves a company called Rockwool Industries, which

aside from a similar name is an entirely different company that does not and never has had any connection to our company, Rockwool Group.

Another canard the writer perpetuates is that we typically build-and-run after 10-15 years of operation. Building factories is a major long-term investment. Just an example, we have eight factories operating for 20 years or more, including two with 30+ years and two with 40+ years — all in the same communities they've always been. Yes, we have closed factories over time (though not many), but I challenge the writer to name a single example in which we built and abandoned a manufacturing facility after such a short time for the reasons asserted. He won't be able to do so, because no such examples exist.

It's correct that we transferred a few pieces of equipment from Poland to Croatia, but it's another demonstrable falsehood to repeat that our workers in Poland suffer "all sorts of diseases." This is simply more nonsense.

It is also false that the EU has banned form-

aldehyde; that Croatia is not subject to EU laws; and that the ROCKWOOL Ranson facility will be three times larger than the one in Mississippi.

The factory in Jefferson County will be built with state-of-the-art technology that meets and exceeds regulations set by the Federal Clean Air Act and MACT (Maximum Achievable Control Technology) standards, which were expanded in 2015 and accepted by the Sierra Club, which played a major role in crafting them. These regulations are in place to protect the health of sensitive populations such as children, the elderly, and asthmatics as well as to protect animals, crops, vegetation and buildings.

We are keeping the lines of communication open. If you have any questions about Rockwool and our newest facility in Ranson, please email us at ransonquestions@rockwool.com.

— Michael Zarin is the vice president of group communications for the Rockwool Group

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Let's focus on 'the Rockwool crisis'

At this point many virtual clouds could be filled detailing the Jefferson County Rockwool

crisis. Here are just a few talking points to consider in the next several weeks:

■ Rockwool has been wooed to come to Jefferson County to set up adjacent to North Jefferson Elementary School, close to both high schools and at least two other elementary schools. The Jefferson County Comprehensive plan has been avoided by annexation and subsequent actions bringing Rockwool to Ranson. It would appear neither Ranson or Jefferson County thought to even consider school location, and the safety of school-age children has been disregarded.

■ The Jefferson County Development Authority may have exceeded its authority bringing in heavy industry like Rockwool. The JCDA's website focus is listed as "making West Virginia one of the best states for business by attracting manufacturing, IT, government, tourism and agriculture businesses." This

goal clashes with heavy industry.

■ Rockwool on its website is proud to make a large donation to Milton District Hospital Foundation in Canada, while at the same time seeking a tax break to come to Jefferson County. Rockwool is getting 10 years of relief from personal property taxes and then will pay 5 percent of book value on their equipment in 2028 and 2029, as per the PILOT agreement. The factory's real estate taxes are also to be greatly reduced. Is this good economic policy for West Virginia to subsidize a foreign corporation (to pollute here)? Remember just recently our teachers had to strike for a modest increase.

■ For Rockwool to start manufacturing in Jefferson County has the potential to be a disaster bigger than the Civil War. Although Rockwool may bring some jobs it could possibly destroy other employment in agriculture, tourism, casinos, racing (horse and car), deter visitors to the Harpers Ferry Park Service, lower surrounding property values, and more by pollution, truck traffic, noise, etc. Will tourists

want to visit a county that has tons of hazardous fine particulate matter spread around over the area each year, even if it is within the government limits? Also volatile organic compounds (VOCs) will spew out of the plant 24/7.

■ Recently, the Jefferson County Farmland protection board announced its opposition to heavy industry including Rockwool. Last week one school board member asked Rockwool to stop construction. Later this week the Jefferson County Commission is holding an emergency hearing to discuss their legal options. These are positive signs. It is important for everyone now to pressure their representatives to stop the Rockwool project; to sign petitions, send letters and appear at hearings and rallies to voice their opinion.

Years ago just a few activists were able to stop the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline project from coming through Jefferson County. The health of the county depends on it.

ROBERT BARRAT  
Shenandoah Junction

— Robert Barrat is a candidate for a seat on the Jefferson County Commission on Nov. 6

### Jefferson NAACP wants stop to Rockwool

The Jefferson County branch of the NAACP is making public its position on the Rockwool plant underway in Ranson.

At the branch's regular August meeting, members discussed the controversy about the construction of the Rockwool plant. Our main concern is the negative environmental effect that it may have on the people in the community.

It was approved by the branch to request a moratorium on the construction of the plant until further studies are completed.

The majority of the membership recommends that the plant not be constructed regardless of the results of the studies.

GEORGE RUTHERFORD  
Charles Town

### Cheers for Spirit's sports coverage

I wanted to take a moment to give a big shoutout to Andrew Spellman. Andrew provided coverage of last week's volleyball game at Jefferson High School and did an outstanding job!

Not only did he provide a writeup for the game, but also several wonderful pictures of our gals playing that evening. When you're 16 years old, seeing your picture and an article with your name in the local paper is such a big deal.

Thank you Andrew and the Spirit of Jefferson for being an ace for local sports!

MICHELLE L. PALMER  
Shenandoah Junction

### Enough of the cotton-candy patriotism

Is patriotism in America like eating cotton candy? Cotton candy is mainly made up of sugar, food coloring and a lot of air. Cotton candy is pretty and it taste good even though it does not have any particular flavor.

Unfortunately no matter how pretty it looks or how good it taste, cotton candy has no nutritional value. The only thing that eating cotton candy does for you, is to add unwanted fat calories to your weight, rots your teeth and possibly give you a sugar high. If you hold it in your hands for 5 seconds it melts and turns into a

gooey mess.

Many Americans believe they are showing their patriotism, when they stand up during the playing of the nation anthem by standing at attention with their hats off, saluting, hands over heart and with tear filled eyes brought on from a momentary sugar high. Their patriotism seems to dissolve like cotton candy does in your mouth as soon as the national anthem stops playing.

This display of patriotism has no more value than the nutritional value of cotton candy. The true substance of patriotism is made up

of more than just standing before and worshiping this deity that we call the American flag. True patriotism is speaking truth to power. In 1776 the founding fathers spoke truth to power, when they presented the Declaration Independence to King George III of England. They let him know that they would not be forced to bow before a King or any flag.

True patriotism is the unconditional recognition of the sacred rights of all people as long as they are not infringing on the rights of other individuals. Being patriotic does not mean surrendering

your rights as an individual in order to conform to group thinking or march in goose step or drink the Kool-aid of the political flavor of the day. The true patriot is the vanguard or protector of the individual's freedom from a majority's oppression. He or she is that individual who is willing to sacrifice themselves by speaking truth to power in the defense of the rights of others.

Wrapping yourself in the American flag does not make you a patriot or insulate you from the truth or the reality of the injustice of innocent unarmed black men being killed by the police.

OWENS BROWN Wheeling